

JUNCO PLUMAGES

by Frank P. Frazier

Last summer, while on vacation in Maine, I banded several immature Slate-colored Juncos. I was struck by the fact that the outer tail feathers of these individuals, only a few weeks out of the nest, were very nearly as white as the adults I band as they migrate through my Montclair, New Jersey, station or winter here.

Here's the record of eight immature Juncos banded between July 5 and 15, 1953:

Band No.	Outer Feather	Second Feather	Third Feather
22-80786	all white	white; trace of gray near base	0.7 white
791	white; trace of gray near base	0.7 white	trace of white
793	Do.	Do.	Do.
795	all white	white; trace of gray near base	Do.
796	Do.	0.7 white	Do.
799	Do.	all white	0.3 white
800	Do.	white; trace of gray near base	0.5 white
804	white; trace of gray near base	Do.	Trace of white

During the winter of 1951-52, I checked the tail feathers of 108 Juncos with the following results:

Number of Birds	Description of Tail Feathers
21	Two outer feathers almost all white; third feather more than half white; trace of white on fourth feather.
66	Two outer feathers almost all white; third feather from a trace to half white.
13	Outer feather white; second more than three-quarters white; trace of white on third.
5	Outer feather white; second more than half white.
3	Outer feather white; second less than half white.
Total 108	

As far as the darkness of breasts and heads was concerned, most, but not all, the birds with the most white on the tails seemed dark enough to be adults. And some, by no means all, of the birds with the least white on the tail feathers were light brownish in coloring.

I re-read what Parks and Bergstrom had to say on this in the May-June 1951 issue of EBBA NEWS (Junco symposium issue), and I am still unconvinced that quantity of white on the outer tail feathers is a guide to age. -- 424 Highland Avenue, Upper Montclair, N.J.

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